

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND DEMOCRATIC POLICY¹

By

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It has been suggested that I address myself to the topic, "The Role of Science in Determining Democratic Policy." Because of the character of my training and experience, however, my discussion will have to be much more limited in scope than this. The only kind of science I feel competent to discuss and which I shall attempt to discuss is social science.

Social science, broadly conceived, is the process of discovering or of making explicit facts and relationships concerning the culturally conditioned behavior of man. It is always a temptation to call attention to the usefulness and rightful place of one's discipline and one's approach. However, instead of dwelling on the potential or the ideal contribution to democratic living of knowledge we have accumulated about man's social life, I propose to present, from my own experience, some of the reactions and obstacles which a social scientist meets when he attempts to apply his techniques and his point of view to the problems of contemporary America.

During the last eleven years or so my time has been divided rather equally between teaching social science, principally anthropology and sociology, in colleges and universities and applying what I know of these subjects as an employee in various government agencies. During the practical phase of these endeavors, I have been an Anthropologist in the Office of Indian Affairs, a Collaborator in the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, a member of the Advisory Council in Human Relations to the United States Forest Service, a Community Analyst in the War Relocation Authority, and a Social Science Analyst in the Office of War Information. During this period I have seen some of the pioneer efforts to tap the resources of social science in government and public affairs unfold and I have personally felt many of the satisfactions and perplexities which this development has brought. If these associations have done nothing more for me, they have supplied me with a rich store of anecdote and incident. The episodes which I shall describe, however, are chosen, not for their entertainment value, but because each

represents a type response and points to particular challenges which the social scientist faces in attempting to apply the lessons of his field to matters of policy.

My thoughts go back almost ten years to a day when I was directed to make a socio-economic study of conditions on a certain western Indian Reservation. I was told in advance that the economic condition of the Indians seemed to be improving steadily but that drunkenness, assaults, and even homicides had also risen in strange parallel. My findings, which were incorporated into a report, were briefly these:

A superintendent who had long had a romantic desire to raise great herds of cattle on western lands was administering the reservation. When he arrived he found the tribal herd in poor condition and the Indians, whose traditions inclined them toward hunting rather than a pastoral outlook, largely indifferent to this possible source of revenue. The superintendent sought to remedy matters in the shortest possible time. He purchased good bulls, he halted over-grazing in certain areas, he had the salt distributed more wisely, he had the fences repaired and kept in repair, he saw that a more thorough job was done at branding and round-up times. The tribal herd increased, the animals were heavier in average and brought more per pound.

But this superintendent made little effort to enlist the help of the Indians in his program. He was disgusted with their initial lack of interest and suspicious of their abilities. On the whole, he ignored them and tended to hire experienced white men from the surrounding country. Actually he utilized Indian labor only twice a year when a very large number of hands was needed for short periods. He managed the industry as though it were his own private enterprise and as though efficiency of operation were the only important concern.

In respect to the division of the earnings, however, this man was scrupulously honest, and the per capita payments to the Indians rose as the stock improved. But the reservation was isolated, and the Indians had little outside source of employment. To provide more income for them without finding an

¹ This is a paper which was read at the Conference on the Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith in New York City on May 26, 1945. Thanks are due to the Conference officials for permission to publish it.

outlet for their energies was no great kindness, for the enforced idleness which prevailed simply led to increased gambling, drunkenness, and disorder. The superintendent was puzzled but not too greatly distressed by the social disorganization which existed. His reports were triumphant recitals of the progress of the tribal herd and the improvement of the grazing lands. In his state of single-mindedness he allowed the little arable land (these Indians had some background in small-scale farming) which the tribe possessed to go under water when a dam was built nearby. Thus, one of the few remaining channels of self-help and self-support was closed to these people.

In my report, I gave the superintendent full credit for his zeal, his excellent intentions, and his honesty. But I suggested that the Indians should have been more fully drawn into the conduct of their own affairs, even at the risk of temporary inefficiency, and that an educational program should have been initiated to foster an interest in conservation and a spirit of independence. But nothing praiseworthy which I had to say could mollify the superintendent. According to his viewpoint he was a man unfairly attacked and betrayed from within his own organization. He argued that every figure, every sale, every common-sense test showed him to be a successful administrator. Yet dreamy-eyed young social scientists were allowed to criticize him and to undermine the efficient work of many years.

During this period of clash of ideas, while policy was being formulated, I found many supporters of my view. But it was interesting to see that there were outspoken champions of the superintendent's position, too, persons who felt that because he had succeeded in one important phase of reservation life, the economic, he should not be too closely examined concerning other, less satisfactory developments.

I use this incident as an example of the kind of contribution the social scientist can make and the kind of resistance he is likely to encounter when he attempts to do it. The social scientist, particularly the anthropologist and the sociologist, is used to viewing culture as a whole and is vitally concerned with the relationship of one aspect of social behavior to every other. But most men have not yet sensed the implications of the integration of human endeavor. They are protagonists for a creed, a race, a social group, a policy or a type of economy; and they uncritically assume that if their particular cause is triumphant, other details of existence will somehow be adjusted. This is the temper which made it possible for millions in Italy and in "democratic" coun-

tries as well, to condone fascism as long as they could be assured that the trains were running on time. They lacked the perspective to see that trains which run "on time" to the detriment of human dignity and freedom, nevertheless run hundreds of years too late. It is this state of particularism which permitted millions to look at Hitlerism for six years and to see only that "order" had been restored in Germany. A more comprehensive understanding would have suggested that the absence of conflict which results from the crushing of opposition to evil is an ominous calm at best.

On another occasion I was sent to a certain locality for the ostensible purpose of determining the lines according to which the Indians there might respond to the terms of the Indian Reorganization Act, a piece of legislation which offered certain benefits to those Indian tribes which accepted its provisions. The act provided for great latitude in the manner in which political organization was achieved as long as some kind of democratic process was respected. It so happened that the Indians of this locality had been given allotments of land and lived on small farms in much the same manner as did their white neighbors.

When I arrived to make my survey, I found that the men whom I had been sent to help and to advise had already made up their minds, without benefit of research, about how to proceed. They had decided that existing counties would act as a convenient framework for the new organizations and they had already made a tour of the counties in which the Indians lived, explaining the terms of the Act and advising the Indians that county organizations which would bring them its benefits would be set up. It apparently had never occurred to them that the people involved might have an alternative political or social framework through which the purposes of the Act would find more adequate expression. Obviously, I was expected to put my seal of approval on the neat plan conceived by men of the administrative branch, and my task would thereafter be the mechanical one of helping to implement the details of organization.

However, letters from representative Indians, conversations with these people, and attendance at their meetings indicated that some of them, at least, were not satisfied with the county plan, but hoped to organize according to patterns and groupings to which they were more receptive and which they still employed for co-operative endeavors. Consequently, I made a survey, identified the type of political organization through which many of the Indians preferred to work and called attention to the

groups which had indicated a desire to organize under an alternative plan.

My findings were received with respect and consideration in many quarters, and a number of organizations such as I proposed were actually formed and flourish today. But, for reasons which I have since seen repeated in various contexts, there were also individuals who were obviously displeased at the note that had been injected into the situation.

One thing this incident taught me -- and there have been many occasions on which to review the lesson -- is that often it is the social scientist's presence and prestige, rather than his knowledge, that are wanted. There are powerful men of affairs everywhere who give lip service to a "scientific age" but who do not propose to alter their habits of mind or action one iota in response to it. Just as the advertiser does obeisance to "science" by posing a man in a white coat near the same old product, this type of executive or administrator is willing and even eager, in deference to the new age, to have a social scientist in the background of the setting he is arranging or to have him put the seal of approval on what is proposed.

Thus, often the social scientist is brought to the scene too late to be instrumental in the formulation of policy. If he disagrees with what has been initiated, he must go through the embarrassment of being the naysayer, of attacking or defending a position instead of calmly carrying out designated research. Obviously, it is a temptation, unless the objective is one of great importance, to give assent in spite of scientific qualms, and thus to insure good relations, status, and advancement. And too often, when the social scientist is not brought in belatedly as an ineffective symbol of enlightenment, he is there as a trouble-shooter, to locate the difficulty after a program has failed to operate according to plan. Neither role is enviable, neither exhausts the potentialities of social science. We must continually emphasize, not only that social science should be used in wider contexts, but that it be consulted when the program or problem is still in the formative stage.

It would take too long to develop the story here, but it should at least be mentioned that some of the coolness toward the alternative form of organization I proposed arose from the fact that it was rooted in the past habits and traditions of these Indians. To some persons this appeared to be unprogressive and even un-American. In their eyes a producer's co-operative based on county residence was eminently forward-looking while a similar co-

operative resting on relations which the people involved felt were much closer, was regressive. The highways of history are wide and numerous, and many peoples have converged along devious paths toward goals which are not too dissimilar. Yet there are always those with us who bemoan the variety and pluralism in our cultural life. These are the people who mistake uniformity for national strength and monotony for homogeneity in ideals. And, sadly enough, they will probably continue to do so in spite of the uniform rubble and disaster to which Germany, the principal protagonist of this view in our time, has now been reduced.

In the last analysis, the place of social science depends less on the will or industry of a few social scientists than on the degree to which our society is truly scientific and really democratic. The spirit of science is scrupulous devotion to truth, not alone when observations are unimportant or positive in coloring, but when they are crucial and even when they disprove what we may fervently hope to find. The democratic credo is not a matter of deference to large and powerful political blocs or even of good-natured tolerance of minorities in normal times. The measure of democracy is the degree to which a majority can rule, without oppression, in times of stress. As one who was living and teaching on the West Coast of this country at the beginning of the war and who became connected with the War Relocation Authority, I have seen these tests applied in this country and I do not look upon the results with pride.

During the decades immediately preceding the war, sociologists, social psychologists, and social anthropologists amassed a tremendous amount of evidence to demonstrate the malleability of the human psyche and the overwhelming importance of environment, training, education, and culture in comparison with racial factors. As a reaction against Hitler's crude racism there was an even greater emphasis on this type of thinking and teaching during the 1930's.

At the time of Pearl Harbor a tiny minority of persons of Japanese ancestry was living in America, principally in Hawaii and on the West Coast of the United States mainland. In respect to them two contrasting attitudes were possible. Modern social science suggested that, since they were either long-term residents of this country or young people born on its soil and reared in its institutions, the great majority would be assimilated to our ideals and loyalties. The racist doctrine taught that, regardless of training and environment, a mysterious some-

thing called "blood" would impel these people to help the enemy.

The manner in which the American public and its leaders turned their backs on social science in choosing between these two philosophies was disgraceful enough, but the whole anti-intellectual, anti-scientific tenor of the decision can be comprehended from the fact that a myth was invented out of whole cloth and sent over the entire nation to justify the evil that was brewing. This is the Pearl Harbor sabotage myth, a tissue of false and fantastic tales which purport to describe how the Japanese and Japanese-Americans of Hawaii aided the enemy and were responsible for the great damage suffered by our forces at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Men of all degrees fell into this moral and intellectual quagmire. The Hearst press gave a prominent place to the cannard, of course, but only after another figure of the publishing world, then Secretary of the Navy, made the charge in an unsubstantiated and erroneous press statement. Westbrook Pegler used the theme as an exercise in invective, but only after Walter Lippman's syndicated column had provided him with materials.

Out of this Nazi-type nonsense and hysteria grew a fear of the Americans of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast and a rising tide of hostility. The murmurs and threats led to calls for protective custody. Protective custody, as in other countries, led to thoughts of evacuation and concentration camps. Cries for the evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry arose from many quarters, and in every case, without exception, the individuals and groups which demanded, advised, or rationalized evacuation did so on the basis of the Pearl Harbor sabotage myth.

Because no civilian organization existed which could handle a forced migration of this scope, the Army was injected into the picture. This has led to a secondary legend, that evacuation was an Army matter, dictated by military necessity. Largely on the basis of such reasoning, evacuation was upheld by a majority of the Supreme Court in a decision which Mr. Justice Murphy, in his eloquent dissent, correctly called "the legalization of racism." As a result of this comedy of errors, all persons of Japanese ancestry of the West Coast have been dislocated, dispossessed, and harried because of the alleged misdeeds of those in Hawaii; while the group in Hawaii, who were supposed to be the miscreants, who live at the very point which was attacked, and

who are, incidentally, more numerous, have not been evacuated, concentrated, or victimized.

If this is an example of what we do when the test comes, I should say that we are still pre-scientific and that we are passing through the infantile stage of democracy.

It requires a disciplined mind to hew to fact rigorously and to discard congenial or conventional fancy. Most men still accept what they want to believe rather than what they know to be true. And what men want to believe is often shallow and sordid. But that does not absolve us from the obligation to teach the best of social science where we may, to apply it where we can, and to exemplify it in our own thinking and conduct.

DISCUSSION²

Since it fell to my lot as a legal adviser to the Secretary of the Interior to play a minor role in formulating decisions on several of the issues to which Dr. Opler has referred, I should like to take the opportunity to say that in my opinion both in the San Carlos-Apache cattle situation and in the matter of the organization of Creek towns, Dr. Opler did a brilliant job in penetrating through the legal and administrative fictions surrounding these social problems and reaching a sound scientific conclusion. I know that his results in the Creek case have been confirmed by actual experience and could cite long lists of figures to demonstrate the uniform success of the organizations established on the pattern which Dr. Opler marked out and the very high proportion of failures, running somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 per cent, among organizations set up on a county-wide basis. I think that probably his determination of the difficulties in the San Carlos-Apache situation could also be confirmed by subsequent developments, but I should be harder put to it, on this score, to find convincing objective evidence. And certainly all of my contacts with the matter of relocating Japanese-Americans have confirmed the accuracy of Dr. Opler's analysis of this problem.

The one unscientific note that is struck by Dr. Opler's paper, I think, is the note of surprise and disappointment at the fact that good ideas do not immediately influence the actions of large bodies and organizations of men. Such a reaction on the part of an anthropologist to the ways of human beings seems to me decidedly unanthropological. Some time

² This discussion immediately followed the reading of the preceding paper. Thanks are due to the Conference for permitting the publication here of these remarks.

ago I suggested the desirability of studying the customs and thought-ways of Indian Service officials as part of the historical process of acculturation. Perhaps Dr. Opler has done something of this sort in analyzing the reasons for the behavior of the San Carlos superintendent. But more important than personal distortions and obstacles in the application of science to administration are the institutional distortions and obstacles, to which I think Dr. Opler pays insufficient attention.

Whether a scientific doctrine is true and whether it is likely to be influential are two entirely different questions. The influence of ideas on human habits is certainly very limited on any short-range view of things. Most human beliefs are fixed, as Peirce pointed out, by authority or by reiteration, rather than by scientific method. What is true of human beliefs generally is certainly true of the beliefs of bureaucrats or administrators. Perhaps it is more true of them because they have a large stake in the maintenance of the status quo and they have a tradition and an esprit de corps which, among other things, serves to protect from outside criticism. Thus to the Indian Service or Colonial administrator any white man who intervenes to voice protests against injustices done to the native population is immediately categorized as a "grafter", a "paid agitator", or a "crank",--a "grafter" if he receives a material reward from the natives, a "paid agitator" if he receives a reward from some other source, a "crank" if he receives no material reward at all. Protection against scientific criticism is a relatively simple matter in the social sciences since we commonly assume that there are no experts on human relations and that any man knows about as much as the next man in these fields. We might even paraphrase Descartes and say that of all things knowledge of human relations is the most equitably divided since every human being is satisfied that he has received his fair share of this blessing. Painfully, our judges have come to realize that they cannot rely entirely on common sense, that is to say, the taught doctrine of a century ago, in the field of economics, but ought to study the results of scientific research in this field before passing judgment on economic issues. But our courts have not yet attained this degree of sophistication in fields of race relations or general sociology, as witness the opinion to which Dr. Opler has referred, in which the Supreme Court justifies throwing persons of Japanese origin into concentration camps as dangerous characters, arguing that after they were thrown into these camps a number of them refused to take a special loyalty oath.

It seems to me then that the most important problem which Dr. Opler's paper raises is the problem of how the contributions of the social sciences can be made more effective in molding governmental action. And without presuming to guide the discussion of this problem I should like to submit three suggestions to the consideration of the symposium participants:

1. In the first place, I should like to make a general plea for the utilization of scientific method in determining the ways and the time-spans in which governmental action responds to scientific discoveries. This involves taking an anthropological view of the habits and institutions of bureaucrats as well as of societies.

2. Consider the poor bureaucrat. How is he to recognize a scientific truth when it is offered to him? Is there not some way in which bodies of scientists can present collectively the propositions which in any given discipline are thought to have the highest degree of reliability? How can benighted bureaucrats, like the writer of these comments, know what to do if scientists are so reluctant to comment on governmental problems that even as frank and honest an anthropologist as Dr. Opler studiously refrains from mentioning names and places. I am sure that many governmental services would be carried out on a much higher level if the scientific groups most capable of criticizing their activities made a practice of reporting to the public regularly on accomplishments and failures.

3. This brings me to a third and final point in the application of scientific findings to governmental administration. Some scientists, particularly social scientists, instead of limiting themselves to the determination of causal relations, presume to tell administrators what they ought to do. This administrators naturally resent because it is part of the process of democracy that social ideals should be set by the people and not by experts, and the people act through representatives and appointed public servants. Government by experts seems to me to be the very antithesis of democracy. If, as I believe, self-government is better than expert government, then the scientist who offers his services to government must make sure that he is offering services and not presuming to govern in the name of a higher wisdom. He must serve by showing the relation between assumed goals and causally connected conditions and consequences. He must beware of the crypto-idealism which has bred so much justified popular distrust of the ethical ideals embraced by psychiatrists, economists, and other social scientists who have smuggled uncritical ethical imperatives into their scientific researches.

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